

The Logan Four meet the Magnificent Seven (and the ugly five): Gabby Logan's family go wild for their South African safari

- Gabby, husband Kenny and twins Reuben and Lois, 9, took a ten-day break
- They stayed at the Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve in Kruger National Park
- Not only did they see a wealth of wildlife, their family bond strengthened

By GABBY LOGAN FOR THE MAIL ON SUNDAY

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Family holidays seem to renew the glue that binds us together. It's not that I don't think my children are tremendous people in term time – we laugh, disagree and chat like most families.

But the days are about four hours too short, agendas packed to the rafters with sport and other clubs, and our communication is dominated by instructions. Sometimes even I think I am a nag.

With such busy social diaries, there's little time to just hang out and I really do like their company. At nine years old, twins Reuben and Lois still seem OK about hanging out with us, too.



© Gabby Logan

Into the wild: Gabby, Kenny, Lois and Reuben and ranger Kosie, left

Having said that, I was determined that this holiday wasn't going to be a ten-day beach and pool-based chill-out where Reuben and Lois find like-minded youngsters to occupy themselves with all day, and we barely catch up with them except to say 'Wear more factor 50' or 'Are you sure that family don't mind you eating lunch with them for the eighth day in a row?'

An African safari seemed the perfect antidote to that. We chose the Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve in the Sabi Sands Wildtuin, in South Africa's Kruger National Park, staying in a lodge geared to children under 12.

That meant there were no objections from the younger Logans, and with amazing food and wine and sophisticated decor on offer, my husband Kenny and I would be happy, too.

We'd all be learning and discovering together, not just eating meals together.

Of course, ten days on safari would be extreme even for the Attenborough family, so we decided to spend four nights at Sabi Sabi, then head up to Victoria Falls in Zambia for two nights, go to Cape Town for two nights, and finish off in Franschhoek for the final two nights.

After flying out from the UK to Johannesburg, we took a direct flight to Skukuza airport in the Kruger National Park. Ranger Kosie met us in one of Sabi Sabi's open-topped safari vehicles – a place we would go on to spend a good part of our four-day stay.



© Alamy/Getty
They spent four nights at Sabi Sabi, then headed up to Victoria Falls in Zambia for two nights, went to Cape Town for two nights, and finished off in Franschhoek for the final two nights

The Kruger National Park measures some 7,500 square miles, an area almost as big as Wales.

During the 45-minute journey through the bush to our lodge, we spotted giraffe, mongoose, impala and leopard tortoise.

I may have still been dressed for the city, but I was already losing my heart to the bush and its incredible wildlife.

Crucially, we had obviously hit the jackpot with Kosie. Knowledgeable and enthusiastic, he was also funny and up for some banter – the kids were lapping up his every word.

The day on safari starts early, with coffee served at 5.30am and the vehicles leaving no later than 6am for the first three-hour drive of the day.

On that first morning I did think: 'Why is that alarm going off when I'm on holiday?' But it soon becomes a normal routine – early starts, a nap or massage in the afternoon, and an early evening safari before dinner and a brilliant sleep.

The logic for being out at extreme ends of the day is that the more rare animals lie low when the sun is at its fiercest and stir when things are cool.

And the rangers obviously know what they are doing because over the course of our few days, we were drunk on wildlife: we didn't just see the Big Five (lion, buffalo, leopard, elephant and rhino), we saw the Magnificent Seven (the Five plus giraffe and cheetah) and the Ugly Five (hyena, marabou stork, vulture, warthog and wildebeest).



Grazing time: Guests on the terrace at the Royal Livingstone in Zambia watch zebras

We learned so much about these amazing animals and birds, and about the environment in which they live.

On our final night at Sabi Sabi, we saw a 'kill' with a happy ending, which Kenny, a former rugby international, declared was the biggest adrenaline rush he had experienced since he retired.

We watched the drama unfold for two hours as a leopard lined up her prey – an impala – only for three hyenas to start circling, getting ready to steal her hard-won meal.

Then a jackal alerted all and sundry to what was going on – like nature's big party-pooper, it screeched into the night air. The leopard now had to rethink her tactics, and with the impala alerted, the scene moved another 30ft into the open space.

The wait went on, and just when we were thinking of calling it a night and heading back to the lodge, it all erupted.

The skinny leopard, which desperately needed food, pounced on the male impala. She had her mouth around its neck and a frenetic tussle ensued.

I could have stayed a few more days at Sabi Sabi but it was time to move on to the stunning Royal Livingstone in Zambia. After a two-hour flight, we took to the Zambezi river and arrived at the hotel by riverboat to a musical welcome.

But the real reason to go to the Royal Livingstone is to be blown away by nature once more.

The Victoria Falls should be on everyone's bucket list. It is impossible to describe the feeling as the spray bounces off the fall 200ft below and flies back up into the air, drenching you from head to toe.

After we had walked the Falls and absorbed their majesty, we flew over in a helicopter – another brilliant way to soak up this wonder.

Cape Town was our next stop, and as we were staying for only two nights we based ourselves at the Table Bay Hotel on the historic Waterfront, which is ideally situated for the city's abundance of tourist attractions.

The weaker rand is making a holiday to South Africa attractive to Britons, and eating out at very good restaurants in Cape Town was extremely reasonable.

We had a fabulous meal at Savoy Cabbage – three courses and wine for us adults – and after leaving decent tip, we still had change from £100.

The final two days were spent at La Residence in the wine country of Franschhoek. If we ever renew our marriage vows, I have warned Mr L that's where it's taking place.

It's incredible. It might look like a hotel for adults, but the children adored it too – youngsters are clearly welcomed. Our biggest mistake was to book just two nights there.

During our stay, we visited a township nearby and popped in to see the work of UK charity Hope Through Action which, with the support of Lessons For Life Foundation, has helped build the Franschhoek Valley Community Sports Centre and Kusasa Early Learning Centre for the kids of the township.

It was an eye-opening and valuable experience and sparked many discussions at dinner that night.

South Africa is a magical country but to ignore the social problems would have been disingenuous. Our children certainly got a glimpse of the bigger picture.

For me, travel is about enriching us as people in all kinds of ways and this trip definitely did that.

We came away enthused, inspired and with the glue that binds us together a bit more sticky.



Gabby and her family witnessed the Magnificent Seven (the Five plus giraffe and cheetah)

TRAVEL FACTS: Plan your own African adventure

Africa Travel (africatravel.co.uk, 020 7843 3580) offers two nights with meals and safaris at Sabi Sabi Bush Lodge, and two nights' each B&B at the Royal Livingstone Hotel in Zambia, Table Bay Hotel in Cape Town, and La Residence Villas in Franschhoek from £11,450 for two adults and two children including hire car, transfers and BA flights.

For details on the charity projects in Franschhoek visit Hope Through Action (hopethroughaction.com) and Lessons For Life Foundation (lessonsforlifefoundation.org).